Scriptures of Christianity & Islam: A Basic Comparison

By

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Foreword

If this booklet were written to announce my conversion to Christianity, no Christian would complain that it is too blunt. So if I must reject an aspect of Christianity in a succinct form, let me not be accused of bluntness either. A Muslim believes in the religion *of* Jesus but sees mainline Christianity as a religion constructed *about* Jesus. Our protest is against two excesses: The apotheosis of Jesus and the most frequent missionary tactic directed toward Muslims.

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Part One

Christians and Muslims who learn something of one another's religion find that a crucial issue is the nature of Jesus. The majority of Christians deify Jesus while Muslims say that he was no more than a prophet of God, a faultless human being. The doctrine of the Trinity avows that three distinct co-equals are God. In particular, Jesus is said to be God the Son or the Son of God. As the Muslim questions details of this theology the Christian characteristically forms a common explanation for our differences: He complains that Muslims do not understand the Trinity: that we are actually accusing Christians of Tritheism and other heresies.

So the Muslim seeks clarification of the teaching and asks at every step: "How could that be so?" For example, we insist that the term "Son of God" cannot have a literal interpretation. Sonship and divine nature would be necessary attributes of such an actuality, but these are incompatible. The first describes a recipient of life while the second describes One who received life from no one. These are mutually exclusive requirements then. To be a son is to be less than divine, and to be divine is to be no one's son.

As a discussion proceeds, it is the Christian who will eventually take refuge in the response: "These are things that we cannot understand." His assessment of the Muslim's problem becomes his own confession. The Christian explanation becomes self-defeating so there is a change of tactic.

He complains that the Muslim refuses to accept what cannot be understood. But the modified approach is a diversion. Now the concepts of *verification* and *understanding* are confused. To illustrate: Chemical reactions may be verified but the atom is not thereby *understood*. Facts are catalogued but not always explained. This distinction is the key to our concise reply. It is the Muslim who must redirect the discussion. Our primary issue is more basic than resolving the incongruities of Trinitarian doctrine. Rather than ask *how* the Trinity can be so, we should ask *why* it must be so. "We ask, "Why must Jesus be divine? Can we verify the necessity of this belief?"

The Muslim Position

A few centuries ago, European philosophers commonly felt that a conjecture was proven if it could be shown to be equivalent to an assertion made by Aristotle. Unfortunately, such an approach stopped short of challenging Aristotle and discovering truth. Similarly, resting the Trinitarian case on what people have said about Jesus stops short of establishing the integrity of the authorities and the truth of the matter.

Our purpose here is no more than the illustration that belief in the Trinity can only be based on Church authority. Many Christians admit that this is the case while others insist that the teaching was elaborated by Jesus himself. "Let them produce their proof," is the repeated admonition of the Qur'an, that is, 'provide the documentation that Jesus himself claimed unqualified deity,' (Qur'an 21:24). Unless this evidence can be produced, authorities are subject to challenge. Then the Christian may not evade

the Muslim's questions concerning understanding. The Christian will have no justification for maintaining an illogical position, unless he is content to rely on the opinions of men. If he will probe no deeper than this, the Christian-Muslim dialogue is finished.

For Christians, the only documents accepted as reporting the words of Jesus are the accounts given in the Bible. We leave the Muslim attitude toward the Bible for part II of this essay and find our motivation now in the Qur'anic verse, "Say: '0 People of the Book! You have no ground to stand upon unless you stand fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord.'" (Qur'an 5:71). Christians are advised to support their claims by citing their books. Thus Muslims believe that no saying of Jesus can be produced which shows him grasping at equality with God. The primary issue is *not* whether Jesus is God. The first question is whether he *said* that he was equal to God.

Methodology

The Bible record of sayings credited to Jesus is quite meager. After allowance for duplication in the four gospel accounts, these sayings could be printed in two columns of a newspaper. None of this handful of texts is an explicit claim of deity. All quotations are implicit, that is, they require interpretation. We are told what Jesus *said* and then told what he *meant*. So our methodology takes an obvious form.

It is not our intention or obligation to reinterpret the Bible. We are satisfied to merely verify that Christian interpretations are insufficient, ambiguous, or impossible. We mean to argue: 1) that where the meaning of a quotation is clear, it is still *insufficient* to prove that Jesus claimed equality with God; 2) that other quotations cited are open to various interpretation, *ambiguous*; 3) and that still other quotations have been given interpretations that are *impossible*. This means the evidence is either inadequate, inconclusive, or unacceptable, respectively.

Insufficient Evidence

The virgin birth of Jesus and the miracles he demonstrated are cited by some as proof of his divinity. The insufficiency of the premise is obvious. We need only read the Biblical account of Adam's creation, without father or mother, and the accounts of miracles associated with the prophet Elisha (Genesis and 2 Kings chapters 4, 5, 6). In the case of these two men, no Christian asserts their divinity, yet each has a qualification in common with Jesus.

Some maintain that Jesus was God because the Hebrew Scriptures predicted his coming. The inadequacy here is only slightly less apparent. The ancient Hebrew Scriptures are also cited as predicting the role of John the Baptist (Malachi chapter 4). These three arguments are mentioned to show that the ready claims of Christians betray a selective or forgetful recall of scripture. They know the fact of virgin birth as well as they know the account of Adam's origins, yet they interpret the first and overlook the second.

Now to pursue our case indirectly. Does the Bible quote Jesus as claiming equality with God? Bible texts are produced to show that Jesus used the terms "son of man", "son of God", "Messiah", and "saviour". But each of these terms is applied to other individuals in the Bible. Ezekiel was addressed as "son of man" (Ezekiel chapter 3). Jesus himself speaks of the peacemakers as "sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Cyrus the Persian is called "Messiah" at Isaiah 45: 1. The duplicity of translators is manifested here, for they inevitably render only the meaning of the word "Messiah" which is "annointed". Where other Bible verses seem to refer to Jesus, they prefer to transliterate "Messiah" or the Greek equivalent "Christ". In this way they hope to give the impression that there is only one Messiah. As for "saviour", the word is applied to other than Jesus (2 Kings 13:5). Christians choose to cite the forty-third chapter of Isaiah as proof that there is only one saviour. Again, translators have tried to obscure the fact that God is the only saviour in the same ultimate sense that He is our only nourisher and protector, though men also have these assigned tasks. By over specifying this pronouncement in Isaiah they hope to have us believe that God equals saviour and Jesus equals saviour therefore Jesus equals God. The conspiracy of modern translation is easily demonstrated. The King James Bible of 1611 is everywhere available. Compare it to a more recent translation, say the New American Bible of this century. In the earlier version we find 2 Kings 13:5 contains the word "saviour", but in the newer version the synonomous word "deliverer" has been substituted. In fact,"saviours", the plural, will be found at Obadiah 21 and Nehemiah 9:27. Here again, by substituting a different word, the connotation of divinity tied to the word "saviour" has been guarded in modern versions by less than honest translation.

Once more we have exhibited the insufficient warrant of arguments offered: Those terms said to connote divinity are used of individuals other than Jesus.

There is a quotation that should be mentioned here also. At John 8:58 it is reported that Jesus said, 'Before Abraham was, I am.' Even if Jesus meant to claim by these words that he was alive before Abraham was, is this sufficient ground to say that he was divine? If Jesus lived in heaven then came to earth it might mean something remarkable, but it would not be enough to establish him as God incarnate. Additionally, it should be noted that these words are open to other interpretation. Christians do not imagine that the prophet Jeremiah had a pre-human existence and so they find a suitable way of interpreting the words of Jeremiah 1:5 which portray such a situation, if taken literally. Why not apply a similar understanding in the case of John 8:58?

Ambiguous Evidence

Some scholars have insisted that in this statement of Jesus just discussed, he appropriated for himself a divine title. In Exodus chapter 3, it is reported that God told Moses "*I am what I am,"* as most English Bibles translate the Hebrew text. At John 8:58 Jesus says, "before Abraham was, I *am,"* as most English Bibles translate the Greek text. But here is the key to another deception. The original of the first text is in Hebrew while the original of the second is in Greek. All but a few of Jesus' words were recorded in Greek. For two hundred years before the time of Jesus the Jews used a Greek translation of their Hebrew scriptures, the Septuagint. This work translated the key phrase *"I am"* of Exodus as HO ON. However, the words of Jesus, "I am".

have been given to us in Greek as EGO EIMI. If the gospel writer of John 8:58 wanted to tell his Greek-speaking audience that Jesus had imitated God he would have used the familiar words of the Septuagint, otherwise the point would be lost. The evidence of John 8:58 is far from conclusive.

There is another Greek word to consider which betrays suppression or neglect of evidence. At John 10:30 Jesus is quoted as saying "I and the Father are one." The Greek word translated "one" is HEN. Certain scholars have insisted that the only possible understanding of this word is ' one in essence or nature'. One need not be a Greek scholar to refute this unjustified claim. A counter example is sufficient. The same word is used by Jesus in John 17:11, 21, 22, 23, as he includes his disciples in this oneness, whatever its meaning.

The most widely translated sentence on earth is said to be Jesus' statement of John .3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only begotten son ... " While Christians wish to say that the word "only-begotten" gives Jesus special status among all the "sons of God", again there is a problem if ambiguity. The same word translated as "only-begotten" is found at Hebrews 11:17. In this verse the word refers to Isaac. The Bible itself shows that Isaac's older brother Ishmael outlived his father (Genesis 25:9). Therefore, at no time was Isaac, strictly speaking, the only-begotten son of Abraham. Recognizing this, Christian scholars qualify the meaning of the word in this case and give it a less than literal interpretation. But if the meaning is subject to interpretation here, why not also in the passage if John 3:16? Once more the possibility, of ambiguity means that John 3:16 is inconclusive evidence.

Whether or not Jesus really used the term "Father" when speaking of God is another controversy. But here our point is again, that such use is inconclusive evidence that God was literally Father to Jesus. *All* Christians use the term when addressing God. The Jews themselves used the term (John 8:41). Jesus told them that the devil was their father (John 8:44). Of course, he was not speaking literally.

Certain scholars stress the verse of Mark 14:36 where Jesus speaks the Aramic word for Father, "Abba". They insist that this implies a very unique relationship between Jesus and God. This displays a schizophrenic forgetfulness. For favourite scripture passages are Romans 8:14 and Galatians 4:6 where *every* Christian is said to use this term of address for God.

Impossible Evidence

An episode is recounted in the twentieth chapter of John and a certain Thomas is quoted as saying, "My Lord and my God." In interpreting this, Christians maintain that Thomas was addressing Jesus by both of these titles. The Muslim would have no objection to the term "Lord". As the Bible explains, the word means "master" and Sarah is said to have called her husband Abraham by this title (Peter 3:6). The suggestion that Thomas addressed Jesus as literally being God is a different matter. Jesus has already pointed out that the Hebrew Scriptures themselves address men as "gods" (John 10:34; Psalms 82:6). This would allow for Thomas' use of the term. However, Paul gave new rules in 1 Corinthians chapter 8, saying that there are many lords and gods " ... yet for us there is but one God, the Father .... and one Lord. Jesus Christ..." Christians apply this verse to sort out the ambiguities of Thomas'

expression. But now we are left with an unorthodox doctrine, namely that Jesus *is* the Father. This ancient heresy has been branded by the Church as Patripassianism, Monarchianism, or Sabellianism. The impossibility of an orthodox interpretation of Thomas is now apparent.

The distinction between Father and Son is essential to the doctrine of the Trinity. This distinction is blurred again when John 14:9 is pressed into service. Here Jesus' reply to a man named Philip is recorded as, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." A strictly literal explication would mean the unacceptable doctrine that Jesus *is* the Father. So interpreters say that "Father" is here equivalent to "God". However, we cannot possibly be obliged to understand that Jesus meant to say that seeing him was exactly the same as seeing God because he *was* God. Our reason is found in the contrariety of John 5:37. Here he told a crowd about the Father saying, "You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form."

The Total Evidence Did the Jew's Understand?

Surprisingly enough, it is often conceded that individual verses are insufficient, inconclusive, or even unusable in the case made for the divinity of Jesus. However, there are those who insist that while any given verse may be deficient, it is the total collection of all such verses that proves the case. This betrays a misunderstanding of the reasoning process. Each verse must prove something, or it is dispensible. Given a verse, we must demand to know exactly what it does prove, and why. Christian exegesis, the traditional explanation of scripture, has been exposed as incredible within the church itself. It has been shown to be enthymemic in the extreme. That is, premises and conclusions are not clearly stated. (Exactly what is meant by the "redemption of man" is still not clear to this date.) Whether we probe the roots or the outgrowth of the system, the structure becomes vague. (See for example. THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE, a Christian publication.)

A final argument has been offered based on the understanding of the Jews. Christians have said that our rebuttal given here is unimportant because the Jews understood Jesus to grasp at equality with God. They cite John 5:18, " ... because ... (he) was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." They pass over the verses which follow immediately, where Jesus subjected himself to God, naming those things which God gave him.

They cite the tenth chapter of John where the Jews tried to stone Jesus for blasphemy. The point of the reply Jesus made is neglected. He demonstrated to those Jews, by quoting their own scripture, that they had no grounds for their accusation.

Curiously enough, in their haste to put claims on the lips of Jesus, part of the Christian church constructs a very confused story. The Hebrew scriptures made reference to a Messiah and the Church says this can only mean an incarnate God and so when Jesus spoke of himself as Messiah he was blaspheming because no man can be God, according to Hebrew scriptures ... or so the reasoning seems to flow together in confusion.

There is a legal point to be made here. *If* the Jews understood that the Messiah was to be a man who was equal to God then a man who claimed to be the Messiah could

only be condemned as a *false* messiah. He could *not* be condemned on the grounds that he uttered a statement which must always be blasphemous in itself. At some future time, the true Messiah would have to speak the very same words without being condemned. When certain Jews declared Jesus' words as blasphemy they could *only* have meant to condemn him as a false messiah. Any supposed connection between the word "Messiah" and the attribute of divinity has no bearing on this matter. (The fact is, the Jews have never believed that the promised Messiah would be a man who is equal to God.)

In the second chapter of Mark, Jesus tells a man, "Your sins are forgiven." The customary interpretation takes the side of the Jews then present, who asked, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" But the verse at John 12:49, among others, explains very well how a man could make such a statement. In this verse Jesus denies any personal initiative. (See also John 8:40; 14:10.) The argument based on Jewish understanding makes the assumption that the Jews understood Jesus. A more viable hypothesis is simply that the enemies of Jesus misunderstood him. In fact Jesus repeatedly alludes to this (e.g. Mark 4:11, 12). It is interesting to note that today Jewish scholars find virtually no objections to anything Jesus said. (See the reference under Jesus in the UNIVERSAL JEWISH ENCYCLOPEDIA.)

Conclusion

We have not merely used the Bible to suit ourselves. Verses have been cited without any commitment as to their veracity. It has been our intention only to show the defects in the Christian stand which says: "Jesus claimed to be equal to God." If we decoct the mixture said to establish that stand, we find inferior ingredients, weak evidence and specious reasoning. Our position has been narrowed enough to make almost any Christian response a step toward the Muslim's position. We have cited the most quoted and *clear* scriptures, so if any others are brought forward. the Christian admits the deficiency of previous arguments, and thus makes a short list even shorter ... the list of quotations said to prove his case. Or, if the Christian builds a case on something other than the words attributed to Jesus, he repeats exactly what we first protested: mainline Christianity is based on what people have said about Jesus.

Afterword

We asked. "Why must Jesus be divine?'" By this we meant to ask why a Christian believes so. If the question is asked without reference to the foregoing discussion, a Christian will answer that Jesus must be divine if his death is to be sufficient atonement for the sins of mankind. In the Christian scheme of redemption, it is held that sacrificial death was necessary that men might be saved. Ask why the death of any man would be insufficient and the Christian replies that all men are imperfect. Ask why they are imperfect and we are told that this is an inheritance from our fathers. Jesus had no father. By their own scheme he would have been an unblemished sacrificial victim. Nevertheless, they still require that he be divine to suit the role of redeemer. So we ask. "Did God die?" He quickly replies, "No, only the man Jesus died." Jesus is said to be a God-man and it was the human component that died. But now he has said that the death of a man has atoned for sin. The Infinite is required for this ritual of sacrifice but the Infinite is not actually sacrificed.

Part Two

There are many missionary tactics directed by Christians toward Muslims. The bulk of these stand immediately condemned by the Bible which speaks about their Master's path being *straight* (Luke chapter 3. Matthew chapter 7). Missionary strategies have included enticement with money, women, alcohol and social status. These methods may lead people, but do they lead by a straight path? A complete exposure of such activities would be a worthwhile document, but this in not our concern here. Christian authors who deal with the Qur'an and the Bible in order to win converts are the subject now.

Disputing the Quran

Attacks on the Qur'an have abounded since the Book's first appearance. In fact, in a remarkable verse the Qur'an invites examination; "Have they not considered the Qur'an? If it was from other than God, surely they would find in it many inconsistencies," (4:82). While many theories have been offered to explain the Qur'an's origin, 'today no sensible person believes these theories. This leaves the Christian in some difficulty,' in the words of the
We want to also mention that no theory has yet been suggested that is not already commented on within the Qur'an itself ... the book replies to its critics.

When a verse of the Qur'an is said to be in error, the Muslim's natural urge is to correct the inaccurate interpretation. But we perform more efficiently if we are realistic. There is a difference in attitude between those who study the Qur'an and those who assault the Qur'an. A sincere questioner has openmindedly accepted the challenge of the verse 4:82. But most often the missionary both attacks and distorts the Qur'an, while pretending to be reasonable. This opponent is not interested in the proper understanding of any given verse. So, we may best proceed as outlined in Part I: We demonstrate only that the so-called difficulty of any Qur'anic verse originates in an interpretation which has not considered sufficiency, ambiguity, or acceptability.

We need only to show: (1) that a given interpretation is inadequate to build a case; (2) or that the meaning of words has been overly restricted and is not the only meaning possible; (3) or that a meaning has been given which is actually impossible.

My experience has often been that Christians who question will find their answers in the same place they found their questions. Frequently they have studied the Muslim commentaries of the Qur'an (TAFSIR), and when they find an obscure point, they bring it to Muslims hoping that we are unaware of research and explanation already done on the matter centuries ago.

What does the Qur'an say About the Bible?

Certain missionary writers intend to tell not only Christians about the Qur'an, but Muslims also, by their eristic methods they build a flimsy case in order to provoke controversy where none exists. They tell us that the Qur'an says the Bible is accurate.

They tell us that the Qur'an accuses Christians of changing the texts of their scriptures. The Qur'an does *not* make either of these assertions. By pointing to disagreements between the Qur'an and the Bible they hope to make difficulty. By arguing for preservation of ancient Biblical texts they intend to cause still more confusion for Muslims. However, these tactics can only work if we admit the premises on which they stand ... and we do not.

First, the Qur'an states that Christians have access to the truth in their scriptures. But it does not catalogue the sixty-six small books called the Bible and label then as accurate. In fact it condemns those who would claim divine inspiration for something composed by a man. Part of the Bible, as will be seen, falls into this category.

Second, the Qur'an does not accuse Christians of deliberately tampering with the original texts of their scriptures. Rather, it accuses them of manipulating the *understanding* of their scriptures. The deceptive translations mentioned in part I illustrate this practice.

In short, the Muslim believes that the Bible *contains* the words of God, and more words *besides* these.

Is Total Acceptance of The Bible Deserved?

The last sentence of the preceeding section states the Muslim's attitude toward the Bible. It is actually the attitude of many Christians. It is only a certain collection of Christians (the Fundamentalists) who maintain that *all* of the Bible originated with God. Adherence to this belief is unwarranted for at least four reasons; (1) It is not claimed within the Bible itself; (2) It is an unworthy attitude;
(3) It is not self-consistent; (4) It is logically impossible.

(1) ... The Bible nowhere names itself. The word "Bible" is not in the Bible. Sixty-six books have been bound as one without any divine command to do so. Compare, for example, the opening of the book of Jonah: "The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying ... ," and the opening remarks of the writer of the third gospel account: "…it seemed fitting for me ... to write it out … ," (NEW AMERICAN BIBLE). The first book claims divine inspiration, while the second author makes no such claim.

By trading on the vagueness of the words "scripture" and "book" the Fundamentalists try to make a case for the Bible's total inspiration. For example, they quote 2 Timothy 3:16 where Paul wrote to Timothy, " ... all scripture is inspired of God…" In the first place, it still remains to establish the authority of Paul did he speak for God here? But the real trickery is in the isolation of this verse. In the sentence before this, Paul indicated what he considered as scripture, namely, that which Timothy studied as a child. When Timothy was a child the last twenty-seven books of the Bible had not been written.

The antepenultimate verse of today's Bible seems to conclude the whole of the Bible, as it warns against adding or subtracting contents in "this book". However, "this book" can only refer to this last book of the Bible and not to the Bible itself. The reason is clear: Any Christian reference will acknowledge that other books of the

Bible were written after this one, that is, the last book in today's Bible was not the last one written. In fact, exactly which books should form the contents of the Bible was still being debated three hundred years after Jesus.

(2) ... The official position of Fundamentalist churches is really a modification of the blunt statement: "The Bible is the perfect word of God." While they consider the modification only slight, it is actually ruinous. They say that the Bible is "inerrant in the original manuscripts". If all contradictions in the Bible could be explained away as misunderstandings, why would they rely on this excuse? By taking this position they admit to errors in the Bible. These are said to be only small copying errors made over the centuries as the scriptures were recopied. They have disregarded the advice of Jesus who said that carelessness in the little things means carelessness in large matters (Luke 16: 10). Yet the unworthy statement about today's Bible is really: "The Bible contains small mistakes but no big ones."

(3) ... There are abundant copying errors in the Bible, the conflicting statistics of Ezra 2:5 and Nehemiah 7:10, for example. On the one hand the Fundamentalist admits this to be the case and excuses it as a minor copying error. On the other hand, he puts his trust in the statement of Isaiah 40:8 which says, "The word of our God stands forever." This verse does not go on to except minor details due to flaws in the transcription of His word. According to this verse, if God says it, it does not get lost. But mistakes of transcription means something of the original has been lost. It is inconsistent to excuse error and simultaneously disallow error. The only solution is to drop the notion of *total* divine inspiration of the Bible.

(4) ... Total inspiration is illogical because it is both disavowed and disproved within the Bible. At 1 Corinthians 7:25 the Bible writer specifically says that he is about to make a statement which did not originate with God…inspiration is disavowed. In the first chapter of Titus we have a counter example which disproves *total* divine inspiration. Paul quoted the famous Epimenides paradox, specifying that the speaker himself was a Cretan: "Cretans are always liars ... " He then says that the man spoke the truth. But when the statement is spoken by a Cretan it is definitely not true. If it was true then at least once, a Cretan was not a liar, in which case the statement is false. The conclusion is the denial of the assumption, so the statement is not true. The writer Paul at least on this occasion, was without divine guidance for he did not discern this subtlety.

Conclusion

The Christian who would preach to Muslims must first be prepared to allow us to clearly establish our own position. Otherwise he confronts a man of straw but misses the target of genuine Islam. His comparisons of the Bible and the Qur'an are most often seen to be shallow and misleading. As with the matter discussed in part I, our most fruitful debates will be those that consider *Why* not *How.* If the Christian wishes to prove his stand, he must *justify* it after *explaining* it. Conversely, if he would attack our stand he must understand it correctly before we can be asked to justify it.

Finally, this is not an attack on the Bible. It is an attack on an unjustified attitude held by some concerning the Bible. Again, the Muslim believes the Bible to contain God's words, but he does not accept the entire contents as such. Deciding which portions deserve our acceptance is not a matter of convenience. It is a matter of consistency. Those portions, and only those portions, which are self-consistent, compatible with reason, and self-proclaimed as divinely revealed deserve our consideration.

Part Three

A Suggestion

Christian belief reduces to this: The Jews have cherished an incorrect notion of the Messiah. That is, while Jews expect someone who is only son of God in a figurative sense. Jesus told the Jews that the Messiah was literally the son of God. In this frame of mind, the Christian can point to every Biblical account of Jews being angry with Jesus and claim that this new truth was the cause of their upset.

But there are important facts to consider. The concept of the Messiah was gradually formed by the Jews and opinions differed. While several men had already been called Messiah, son of God, son of man, in scripture, the Jews came to expect a preeminent Messiah, a victorious leader through whom their nation would be a blessing to all the world.

Our suggestion is this: Suppose instead that Jesus meant to tell the Jews that while he *also* deserved to be called Messiah, he was not to fulfill their unrealistic and misunderstood expectations. Now several mysteries are clarified. Jesus could not have meant to claim status for he charged his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the true Messiah (Luke 9:21). Notice how he dissuaded a man who may have had mistaken ideas (Matthew 8:20). While many Jews believed that the Messiah would inherit his kingly rights from David, Jesus pointed out the difficulty of this interpretation (Matthew 22:43). Note also that today's Jewish scholars have indicated that "son of God" is given its Christian meaning not by Jesus, but by Paul. (See "son of God" in reference 3.)

Meanwhile, some Jewish aspects have been adopted. Paul incited Christians to find symbolic meaning in scripture (1 Corinthians chapter 10). So we have impossible parallels like that of Matthew 2:15 which quotes a fragment of Hosea 11:1.2 and thus likens Jesus to an idolatrous nation! We have the unprecedented case of a prophet who supposedly would die then to return to fulfill all things expected of him. While Acts 3:20-23 promises the return of Jesus. Christians understand that the prophecy yet to be fulfilled *before* he can return is actually only a reference to Jesus ... as though Jesus was the one predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 18. The scripture quoted here by the disciple Peter reports that God told Moses about the future prophet "like you from among their brother's". While Jesus was unlike Moses in being leader of a nation. Christians believe that he will be victorious on his second visit. However, they do not usually expect him to acquire a human father, a wife and children and then die of old age like Moses. Moreover, "from among their brothers" seems to indicate not an Israelite, but a relative of that nation.

There is another historical figure who fits the role as the prophet promised by Moses better than Jesus. He was not an Israelite, but Jesus said that God's special favours would be taken from Israel and given to a nation which would become fruitful (Matthew 21:43). It was Jacob or Israel the man himself, who prophesied that the kingdom would be the possession of the family of his son Judah until the coming of "the one whose it is" (Genesis 49:10). While Christians see this one as Jesus, look

again at these words. When I give a man something and tell him to keep it until the owner comes, do I mean to say that the item belongs to one of his descendents? This would hardly be a natural understanding.

The many Qur'anic and Biblical references to the last prophet are a new subject, a satisfying discussion that inexorably leads to the Messenger who brought Islam to a nation and through them to all nations. (Qur'an 6:89,90).

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